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JOHANNESBURG

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ANNUAL  
REPORT:  
SDG REPORT

1 NO  
POVERTY



SDG 1: NO POVERTY

Our Future  
Reimagined

# UJ SDG REPORT 2023

## SDG 1: NO POVERTY

# 1 NO POVERTY



# Report on the University of Johannesburg's Contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 1

## SDG 1: No Poverty

### OVERVIEW: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) has positioned itself as a leader in addressing poverty through its alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG 1) on No Poverty. UJ integrates a multidimensional approach, leveraging its strengths in education, research, community engagement, and partnerships to combat poverty in South Africa and beyond. This report highlights UJ's initiatives in 2023, including transformative student funding programmes, community-driven projects, research innovations, and skills-development initiatives that aim to uplift vulnerable communities and foster long-term socio-economic sustainability.

The report also discusses the challenges faced in implementing these initiatives, the opportunities presented by technological advancements, and UJ's strategic direction for future contributions to poverty alleviation. With a clear focus on societal impact and sustainability, UJ's efforts are a testament to its role as a transformative and socially responsive institution.

# INTRODUCTION

Poverty remains a critical issue in South Africa, where systemic inequalities, unemployment, and resource disparities continue to perpetuate economic and social challenges. Over 55% of South Africans live below the national poverty line, with youth and marginalised communities disproportionately affected. Against this backdrop, the role of higher education institutions in addressing poverty has become increasingly significant.

The University of Johannesburg, a prominent institution in Africa, recognises its responsibility to tackle these challenges. With its Strategic Plan 2025 and the newly developed Strategic Plan 2035, UJ emphasises societal impact as a key institutional goal. These strategic frameworks align with global imperatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on SDG 1: No Poverty, as well as complementary goals like Quality Education (SDG 4) and Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10).

UJ's efforts in addressing poverty extend beyond academic excellence, incorporating financial aid, research-driven solutions, community engagement, and skills development. By combining these elements, UJ aims to break the cycle of poverty and contribute to sustainable economic and social development.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO NO POVERTY

### ***1. Student Funding and Financial Aid Programmes***

UJ has long recognised that access to education is a critical tool for breaking the cycle of poverty. In South Africa, financial barriers often prevent talented students from pursuing higher education, leading to generational poverty. UJ's financial aid programmes are designed to address this issue comprehensively.

In 2023, over 60% of UJ's undergraduate students relied on the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). While NSFAS provides significant support, it does not fully address the financial needs of all students. To fill this gap, UJ launched supplementary initiatives, such as the **SRC Trust Fund** and the **"Missing Middle" campaign**. These programmes provided targeted financial support to students who fall outside the NSFAS threshold but cannot independently afford tuition and living expenses.

Additionally, UJ's **"Double Our Future" campaign** sought to mobilise donor funding to support disadvantaged students, with a focus on creating long-term opportunities for access to higher education. In 2023 alone, these initiatives enabled hundreds of students to continue their studies despite financial hardships.

UJ also addressed emergency financial needs through responsive aid mechanisms. For instance, during periods of economic disruption, students who lost family income were provided with temporary financial relief. These interventions were particularly impactful during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring continuity in education for vulnerable students.

Beyond financial support, UJ implemented holistic measures to improve student success rates, such as mentorship programmes, academic support services, and mental health resources. These programmes ensure that financial aid recipients not only access education but also excel academically.

## ***2. Community Engagement Initiatives***

UJ's commitment to societal impact is evident in its extensive community engagement initiatives, which focus on empowering disadvantaged populations and fostering sustainable development.

The **Soweto Science Centre**, a flagship community project, provided academic support to over 5,000 high school learners in 2023. These students, primarily from underprivileged backgrounds, received tutoring in critical subjects like mathematics and science, access to career guidance, and preparation for university entrance exams. By addressing the educational disparities faced by learners in underserved communities, the center plays a vital role in creating pathways to higher education.

In rural South Africa, UJ implemented the **Eastern Cape Water Provision Project** to tackle water scarcity, a pressing issue affecting health, education, and economic activities. Using advanced hydro panels, the project harvested clean water from atmospheric vapor, supplying over 10,000 liters of potable water to communities without reliable infrastructure. This initiative not only improved living conditions but also alleviated the burden on women and children, who often bear the responsibility of fetching water in rural areas.

UJ's **Women in Community Engagement Empowerment Programme** supported entrepreneurial women by providing training in business management, access to microfinancing, and mentorship. In 2023, this programme enabled over 50 women to launch small businesses in sectors such as agriculture, crafts, and services, generating income for their households and contributing to local economies.

Other notable projects included food security initiatives, such as community gardens, which provided nutritious produce to low-income families while teaching sustainable agricultural practices.



### **3. Research and Innovation**

UJ's research initiatives are designed to address the root causes of poverty and develop scalable solutions. By integrating technological advancements with local knowledge, UJ creates innovative approaches to combat socio-economic challenges.

In 2023, a groundbreaking research project focused on food security resulted in the development of cost-effective, 3D-printed biscuits made from indigenous grains like cowpeas and quinoa. These biscuits were designed to address malnutrition in impoverished communities by offering an affordable, nutrient-rich food option. This project, now expanded to the doctoral level, aims to scale production and explore the use of other indigenous grains.

The **Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA)** conducted policy-oriented research on poverty reduction, social welfare, and inequality. Its studies on social grant systems provided critical insights that informed national policies, ensuring more effective delivery of resources to vulnerable populations.

Another key area of research was economic empowerment through digital technology. UJ explored how 4IR (Fourth Industrial Revolution) tools could be used to provide skills training and employment opportunities to youth in underprivileged areas. For example, virtual reality simulations were used to train participants in technical fields such as construction and healthcare, equipping them with skills that are in high demand.

### **4. Economic Empowerment and Skills Development**

Economic empowerment is central to UJ's poverty-alleviation strategy. In 2023, UJ expanded its Continuing Education Programmes (CEPs) to address the skills gap in the labor market. These programmes provided training in fields such as digital literacy, technical trades, and entrepreneurship, targeting unemployed youth and marginalised communities.

For example, the **Digital Skills for Africa** initiative trained over 1,000 participants in essential IT skills, preparing them for employment in the technology sector. Similarly, UJ's partnership with local industries facilitated apprenticeships and on-the-job training for participants, enabling them to gain practical experience and secure employment.

UJ also supported small business development through its business incubators. These incubators offered mentorship, funding, and networking opportunities to entrepreneurs, helping them launch and grow their ventures. In 2023, these efforts resulted in the establishment of over 20 new businesses, creating jobs and fostering innovation in local communities.

## **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS**

UJ's poverty-alleviation efforts are strengthened through partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, and international organisations. Locally, UJ collaborated with the Gauteng Department of Education to improve access to resources for underprivileged schools. Internationally, UJ engaged with institutions like the African Union and BRICS partners to share best practices and scale impactful projects. These partnerships ensure that UJ's initiatives are sustainable, scalable, and aligned with global development priorities.

## **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Despite its successes, UJ faces significant challenges, including resource constraints, economic instability, and systemic barriers like unemployment. However, these challenges also present opportunities for innovation. By leveraging 4IR technologies, UJ is developing scalable solutions that enhance accessibility and inclusivity. Expanding its online education platforms, for instance, allows UJ to reach underserved populations, providing flexible and affordable learning opportunities.

## **CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD**

The University of Johannesburg remains a beacon of hope and transformation in the fight against poverty. By integrating education, research, community engagement, and partnerships, UJ addresses both the symptoms and root causes of poverty. As the institution implements its Strategic Plan 2035, it aims to deepen its societal impact, expand its initiatives, and continue its leadership in creating sustainable solutions to poverty. UJ's unwavering commitment ensures that it will remain a catalyst for positive change in South Africa and beyond.

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